

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

July 31, 2014

The Honorable Tom Wheeler
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

Received & Inspected

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FCC Mail Room

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Dear Chairman Wheeler:

Broadband Internet access has become an essential part of the economic and social fabric in many rural communities, as a tool to build businesses, apply for jobs, enhance educational opportunities and connect to friends and relatives. With robust broadband service, even a small town can rely on its residents' talent and determination to compete with the world. Without it, the same community risks being left behind in today's technology-centric economy.

Phase II of the Connect America Fund ("CAF II") offers a tremendous opportunity to bring advanced fiber-fed broadband connections to millions of Americans in rural areas. Thanks to the Commission's well-publicized efforts, thousands of rural communities are now counting on CAF II. Indeed, the June 10 Further NPRM has raised hopes further by more than doubling the promised download speeds in the 2011 USF/ICC Transformation Order, from 4 Mbps to 10 Mbps.

We are writing today to emphasize how important it is to ensure that the final details of CAF II live up to its promise. We are concerned that if the Commission more than doubles the speed requirements without allowing the appropriate level of flexibility in other elements of CAF II, the program's overall mission could be endangered. To the Commission's credit, the June 10 FNPRM identifies a number of constructive ideas that could help achieve the speedier network goals without exceeding the CAF II annual budget. These include extending the term of support up to ten years and providing flexibility on the build-out parameters. We hope you will take these ideas to heart.

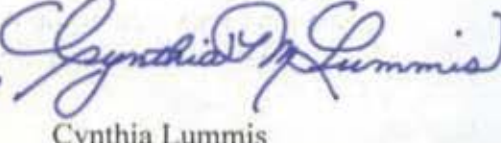
We also encourage you to be as precise as possible when targeting support to areas where broadband would not otherwise be available. Now that we are in the final phase of CAFII, we hope the FCC will collect targeted, accurate data on existing service areas to ensure that all unserved customers have access to broadband. It is also important that this effort protects the interests of existing providers from overbuilding.

Despite years of federal efforts to overcome the digital divide, we continue to hear from constituents in Wyoming who seek assistance in bringing advanced broadband service to their homes. The concerns they raise are a reminder of how challenging rural broadband policy can be, but also how important it is that we work with all stakeholders to ensure that we get it right. We thank you for considering our concerns and look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,


Michael B. Enzi
United States Senator


John Barrasso, M.D.
United States Senator


Cynthia Lummis
United States Representative

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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

August 28, 2014

The Honorable John Barrasso
United States Senate
307 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Barrasso:

Thank you for your letter regarding the implementation of certain aspects of Phase II of the Connect America Fund (CAF II). In your letter, you express concerns that the overall mission of the CAF II program could be endangered if the Commission increases the current broadband speed benchmark for program recipients to 10 Mbps downstream /1 Mbps upstream without allowing flexibility in other elements of the program, and suggest several proposals to provide such flexibility. Your views are very important and will be included in the record of the proceeding and considered as part of the Commission's review.

I agree with you that high-speed broadband access is an essential component for economic growth in rural communities. The universal service program is one of the most important tools at our disposal to ensure that consumers and businesses in rural America have the same opportunities as their urban and suburban counterparts to be active participants in the United States of the 21st century. We are focused on updating the universal service high-cost program to ensure that we are delivering the best possible voice and broadband experiences to rural America within the confines of our Connect America budget, while providing increased certainty and predictability for all carriers and a climate for increased broadband expansion.

In April, the Commission voted to move forward with Phase II of the Connect America Fund for price-cap carriers. Among other things, the *Connect America Fund Phase II Report & Order* sets a term of 10 years for support awarded through the competitive bidding process to stimulate greater interest from participants and ensure that funding is targeted efficiently to expand broadband-capable infrastructure throughout the country. In addition, in the associated *Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (FNPRM)*, the Commission sought comment on a number of the issues you raise, including revising the current broadband performance obligations to require minimum speeds of 10 Mbps downstream, and applying the same performance obligations to all recipients of Phase II support and to rate-of-return carriers. The *FNPRM* also seeks comment on a proposal to allow recipients more flexibility as to other components of the program, such as the ability to substitute locations in partially-served census blocks for locations in the unserved census block for which it received support.

We expect a robust record on these topics and I welcome a dialogue with stakeholders as to how best to accomplish our shared objectives. I look forward to working with you as we continue reforming and modernizing the universal service fund high-cost program – as well as

Page 2—The Honorable John Barrasso

other components of the Fund – to ensure that all Americans have access to robust voice and broadband services.

I appreciate your interest in this matter. Please let me know if I can be of any further assistance.

Sincerely,

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Tom Wheeler



OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

August 28, 2014

The Honorable Michael B. Enzi
United States Senate
379A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Enzi:

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OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

August 28, 2014

The Honorable Cynthia Lummis
U.S. House of Representatives
113 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congresswoman Lummis:

Thank you for your letter regarding the implementation of certain aspects of Phase II of the Connect America Fund (CAF II). In your letter, you express concerns that the overall mission of the CAF II program could be endangered if the Commission increases the current broadband speed benchmark for program recipients to 10 Mbps downstream /1 Mbps upstream without allowing flexibility in other elements of the program, and suggest several proposals to provide such flexibility. Your views are very important and will be included in the record of the proceeding and considered as part of the Commission's review.

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